

TAUE! DREAMER! TSURUTA! and other things I saw and heard this week.

Howdy!

Welcome to DEATH VALLEY DRIVER VIDEO REVIEW #5!

It was a big week for killing time watching tapes of wrestling- what with the Hurricane and all! Of course, the two megathreads are still making sure nobody can go to bed at a normal hour, so time was still tight.

- I watched Akira Taue vs Tommy Dreamer (PHIIIIIIIIII!) in All Japan and YEP! I can see why Dreamer isn't gonna threaten anybody for the Triple Crown any time soon, in that he was squashed in four minutes by the then-lethargic Taue. Dreamer looked as uncomfortable in All Japan as Akira Taue would look in the ring with El Hijo del Santo so I don't wanna come down too hard on our boy Tommy. I then watched Dreamer's match with Funk against Raven and Cactus Jack in ECW and- c'mon gals and guys!- Tommy was born to be a garbage wrestler. He was brilliant in that match! Funk and Cactus did their usual world class brawling and Raven did the touching halo of barbed wire Tribute to Matsunaga. From a wrestling standpoint, Dreamer is Onita-like in the feigning of technical wrestling but you can tell he is really into the violent end of it. I'm just glad that Tommy Dreamer has found a niche that he finds rewarding and that he realized his lot in life before did something really stupid, like wallow in midcard status in the big two in Japan and The US of A for the rest of his career. The world can use an American Masato Tanaka, but, hey, one Tom Zenk was enough (God bless him). We're looking at a new worldwide trend of better wrestlers getting mixed up in the garbage leagues and, hell, I'm all for it. Garbage wrestling isn't going to go away so they might as well try and make it into something cool (as opposed to just sick); if you stick enough talented and semi-talented guys into it, an actual, credible style may come out of it. If that ever reaches fruition, then FMW and ECW won't be so apologetic to the normal organizations when it comes to defending the more excessive aspects of their matches and can say it works on its own terms. I don't see people coming down on Lucha Libre because three guys sometimes pin one guy at one time. It works in the realm of Lucha Libre so to hell with everybody else; it works on its own terms, it doesn't matter if anybody thinks it's wrong, that's the style and that's that. It's a staple of the style. If these talented young punks in ECW and FMW work out a credible style over a period of time, they can have the same privilege and it won't be compared to regular pro style. It will be its own style and have its own rules. It has to get past the point of being chumps who can't actually wrestle so they hit each other with chairs; It has to reach the point where it is wrestlers who decide to expand the repertoire at their disposal to include violent elements outside the normal pro style, but use them in addition to, as opposed to "as in place of", wrestling skill. FMW is reaching that point with its young guys, why shouldn't the US have its own vanguard, with Dreamer at the point.

- I watched the September installment of WRESTLING POWER 96 and it rocked as usual. This month it concentrated on two smaller US indie organizations with two matches- one pretty good, one REALLY good. The pretty good one was Lance Diamond vs Cheetah Master in an Ironman match from Pennsylvania Championship Wrestling. It looked to be from a nightclub and the action was very highflying at times with decent amounts of upper level mat wrestling mixed in.

The Cheetah Master is a young blond haired guy who was more aerial and Diamond was pretty proficient in a lot of the more intricate mat moves one usually doesn't get in an indie match. There were jerky sections of the match as these youngsters hadn't figured out exactly how to time their transitions between sequences just right yet, but many of the intricate pinning sequences were pretty choice once they got them rolling. Cheetah Master hit a couple really nice springboard moves, the best being a springboard dropkick and a less successful springboard dropkick of Diamond off the turnbuckle (but I can only think of five or six guys who can pull that off with a lot of success, so it was cool that he hit it as much as he did.) Diamond hit a great Northern Lights suplex. The action was pretty constant the entire half hour and the pacing wasn't as breakneck as young highflyers tend to fall into, which would have screwed up any chance for effective selling. This was pretty impressive and more seasoning will get these guys where they need to go because they both have a decent base to build on. The second match was INSANE for Waynesboro, VA (Tim where do you find these cards?) David Jericho went up against Chris Hamrick in what looked like a High School gym in Waynesboro. These guys are already there. Somebody sign them up. David Jericho wrestled at the Chesterfield County fair last week and this is third match I have seen him in and he is my indie fave. All there is left is for someone from a larger organization to notice him and he will be on his way. He has great charisma and can really wrestle. He did a great frankensteiner and flew around like champ. This was the first Chris Hamrick match I'd ever seen and he was REALLY impressive. There was an awesome top rope gutwrench powerbomb by Hamrick that was just like Benoit would do. He was also not afraid to bleed profusely. I want to see more of these two, they rule! Flex Kavana was in the Power Spotlight and he seems like he will be impressive after a while. Hey Tim! Next month Mark "the Shark" Shrader and M. Mossman are my nominations for Power Spotlight! Tim Noel is to US independent wrestling what Dave Fields is to Lucha Libre and John D. Williams is to Japanese wrestling- an almanac of knowledge at our fingertips.

- I watched the 3/2/94 WAR show with Onita/Tarzan Goto vs Ashura Hara/Tenryu headlining and, as usual, WAR delivers the very best and the very worst. I wasn't prepared for a Meng/Mr. Hughes match but there it was, right on the screen, staring at me like a bad Family Matters rerun. There was also a truly horrible match between Koji Kitoa and a masked Sumo guy that I couldn't make out. That one stung. OUCH! On a much happier note, there was a Great Sasuke/SATO (now handsome Dick Togo) vs Orihara and Ultimo Dragon match. THIS MATCH WAS GREAT! And I really don't even like Orihara all that much. But this time around, Orihara is such a prick that he worked off the eternally-face Sasuke really well. I really wanted Sasuke to kick his ass bad, so maybe Orihara was doing his job of riling me up really well. The only part I really didn't like was Orihara no-selling a piledriver. I mean what is this guy, the suckass RW Hawk? Sasuke stayed in the ring and flew all over the place between the ropes with Ultimo Dragon. SATO showed his precursor to "Dick Togo, the Bump Taking Machine" form by taking some pretty hellish bumps. Dick Togo/SATO is quietly made his mark and creeping up my list of wrestlers who RU LE! I mean, HECK! he does the fattest Senton in the world and sometimes he does it from the top rope to the floor. The Onita/Goto match was pretty great. I hadn't seen it in a while (I have it on a Scott Decker compilation that I got a while back). I think I liked it the most because a.) these g uys are old enough to be my father but still worked their hinders off, and b.) Ashura Hara looks exactly like my Uncle Doug (who could kick all four of these guys' asses.)

- I watched the Ironman match from BeachBlast between Steamboat and Rude and, boy!, that was as good as wrestling gets. I've watched about fifteen Steamboat matches the last couple of weeks and he HAS to go down as an ALL-TIME great. I'd put him up with anyone. He always did great things regardless of the bizarreness of his particular push or his state of health. The fact that at that point Rude was healthy enough to still work helped put this match way over the top, and the ending is great with the mad scramble to get a pinfall.

- Speaking of wrestlers that could work, I watched a batch of Ric Flair in Japan matches. I got one thing to say- Jumbo Tsuruta was a great wrestler and people don't give him enough respect. All the matches against Flair are as good as it gets and smoke the Tenryu matches against Flair like a cheap cigar. The truly weird thing is that on this same tape is Flair versus Steamboat in Japan in one of the best matches I've ever seen between the two (and that would be saying something, growing up in the Mid-Atlantic era for part of my childhood) and the Japanese crowd sits on its hands. It's weird because the crowd freaks out for the Flair/Martel AWA vs NWA belt match and it's half as good as the Steamboat match. Did the Japanese audiences have something against the Steamer or something? The Flair/Martel match is the best I've seen Martel in but I really haven't seen much pre-Model Martel. Talk about old-school wrestling psychology, this was steeped in it (as were all of these matches.) Highspots were few, great sequences of pinfalls abounded and everybody sold like Motherfuckers.

- I watched Silver King (or as I call him- Silver God)/Shocker vs Dr Wagner/Super Astro and it was as fast paced and fabulous as one would expect. Shocker does the KING OF TOPES on Dr Wagner and does a Ciclón Ramírez-style ending of driving him into chairs with armrests completely out of control. As if that wasn't enough, Silver King grabs Wagner (who is his actual brother) and throws him into the fourth row in what has to be a truly painful sequence for the lesser-wrestling brother. I've got two brothers and there have been times when I have wanted to do tht.

- I watched a couple matches while taping them for other people and the best spot I saw was during the Sasuke/Onita barb wire no-ropes death match when Sasuke does the Sasuke Special over barbed wire strung across the ringposts onto Onita into the exploding Spider net. Also the Ohtani/Sasuke match from 10/94 was truly beautiful and lasted 3 hours it seemed like (but in a good way.)

- I watched the Best of the Hart Foundation and I didn't realize how much Niedhart has deteriorated; he could actually work at one time. All of these were pretty choice, the most choice being the match against the Rougeaus. Jacques Rougeau is my new quest to get a lot of stuff about, because I was so not into WWF when he was doing his best stuff that I didn't see a whole lot of him. I never realized what a graceful wrestler he was and I wonder if the French Connection will live up to the Rougeau matches Jacques was in. The match against the British Bulldogs was pretty cool but there wasn't enough Dynamite Kid and Bret Hart one on one for my tastes. The great added extra was the evil Bret Hart against Ricky Steamboat, in keeping with

recurring Steamboat theme that has been the last month. Stampede meets Mid-Atlantic and everybody wins.

NEXT WEEK: LUCHA! LUCHA! LUCHA! and hopefully that Ultimo Dragon/Chris Jericho match people were raving about and the 95 Best of the Super J and a whole bunch of AJW!

NANIWA~!

- Dean Rasmussen, Friend to the KING OF DAN